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JAMES B. CONANT - *from*  
588 FIFTH AVENUE  
NEW YORK 36, N. Y.

10,601  
December 10, 1958  
*(sic) saw 12/12*

Air Mail, Special Delivery

The Honorable John Foster Dulles  
The Secretary of State  
Department of State  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Foster:

I have just received a letter from Livie Merchant in which he stated that you would like to have me write you at once about the Berlin situation. I appreciate the invitation and am happy to give you my views for what they may be worth. Needless to say, the premises of my thinking reflect my experiences of two years ago. I am, of course, not up-to-date on any developments of a confidential nature.

I assume that the position which is finally reached would be a joint U.S.-British-French-German position. I wish that the SPD leaders in Germany might be brought into the picture in some way. I suggest that the Chancellor be urged to have another talk with Ollenhauer to see if some approach to a bipartisan foreign policy could be made. Perhaps you or one of the other Foreign Ministers might see Ollenhauer together with the Chancellor if the latter would agree.

I am still firmly of the opinion that no negotiation of any sort should be opened with the German Democratic Republic. And I hope the first public statement of the Western position will make it plain that we will use force if necessary to insure that West Berlin remains under the control of the present freely elected government, and that likewise we will use force if necessary to insure that the city is supplied as at present. In private communication to the Soviets, I would suggest spelling out in detail what this statement means. I would favor stating that the day Krushchev carries out his threat

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and declares that his government has no further responsibility in the Zone or in Berlin, we would be prepared to occupy with our troops as much of his Zone as would be necessary to insure free passage of goods to Berlin by rail and autobahn. We would consider that his abdication of authority over the East Germans leaves us no choice but to exert our authority of as much of Germany as is necessary for us to fulfill our commitment to free Berlin.

If it comes to a showdown the first step the East regime will probably take would involve interfering with the flow of supplies to the civilian population. (In a sense they did take this step when they raised the autobahn tolls in 1955.) I do not imagine that we would take aggressive military action against the Soviet troops in retaliation for the East German soldiers stopping civilian trucks. But, I believe it would be proper for us to react at once to such stoppage (after Krushchev has declared the Soviet's authority is at an end) by a disposal of our troops to insure communication between the Federal Republic and free Berlin. The East Germans would have to be the first to shoot under the conditions. I doubt if they would, and if they did public opinion in the U.S. and in the free world would be on our side.

If the East regime did not stop all traffic but only annoyed us by intermittent stoppages because of broken rails and bridges, I think the West Germans should reply by embargoing all exports to the Soviet Zone. Such action was discussed in 1955, and I was then convinced that in an economic battle we had better weapons than the East. The Federal Republic did not agree as they were worried about the supply of brown coal. The possibility of an economic offensive against the East Germans might well be reexamined.

Finally, I venture to suggest a possible new twist to our policy on reunification. I have in mind the possible need of meeting the British Labor Party's demand for a "new look" at this issue. I should be against any attempt to bring together representatives of the Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic. As a counter-proposal with propaganda value, we might offer to try and arrange elections in each of the states in the Federal

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Republic if the Soviets would do the same in the six states of their Zone. The voters would choose representatives to meet in an all-German council, which would have no administrative powers but which would be concerned solely with exploring a basis for reunification. Neither the Federal Republic nor the Democratic Republic would be represented on the council. I should not insist on supervised elections. Of course, the result would be six Communist members of the council, but since the council would be only for purposes of talk, this would not be dangerous.

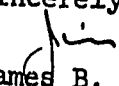
I suppose the Russians would reject the offer, but our having made it might be a good move particularly with reference to the attitude of the British Labor Party. (Gaitskill and I debated German reunification in an issue of WESTERN WORLD last Spring.) If the Russians were to accept the proposal, clearly the Berlin situation would be frozen in the present status until this all-German council could meet and proceed with their deliberations. These deliberations might take forever. Yet such a delaying action, it seems to me, is on our side.

I have no idea whether the Chancellor or the opposition leaders would consider such a proposal of any value. Of course, it could not be put forward unless there were agreement at least with the Chancellor. But if the idea seemed to have merit to the West, it might be pushed vigorously with the Germans, as I am afraid the Chancellor's first reactions to any new ideas of this sort are apt to be over-conservative. It might be pointed out to him that this action would be by the four occupying powers and would simply be used as a mechanism for getting together representatives from separate German states for a preliminary negotiation, looking forward to a proposal for an all-German government.

I hardly need say that I realize that many, if not all, of my ideas may be of no value because of conditions which are unknown to me. Thank you for the opportunity of writing.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely,

  
James B. Conant

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